Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.

Editor: Michael P Birks, Flixton Girls' School, Urmston, Manchester M31 3DR, England 061-747 5924 (Home)

Vol III, Nº.54 January 1994

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The **Central American Group** is a part of the **Spanish Main Philatelic Society,** the leading Society in the world for collectors of Latin America. The journal of the SMPS is 'The Mainsheet', published quarterly, and is available by annual subscription from the Secretary, Brian Moorhouse, PO Box 105, PETERBOROUGH PE3 8TQ, England. Phone 0733 268708. Subscription is currently £8 in Europe or $20 elsewhere. Cheques in sterling or US$ should be made payable to 'The Spanish Main'. A three year subscription of £21/$54 and a five year subscription of £30/$80 are available and payment for these longer subscriptions may be made by Access, Mastercard or Visa.

The **Central American Group** caters for collectors of Mexico to Panama. Its journal, which you are now reading, is published quarterly, and is available by annual subscription. The subscription is currently £5 in Europe or £6 elsewhere. Dollar bills, or sterling cheques payable to 'The CA Group' should be sent to the treasurer, Colin Eddleston, 19 Sion Hill, BATH BA1 2UJ, England. Phone 0225 315608. We shall be pleased to forward the relevant portions of multi-subscription cheques to the SMPS or the Chile Group.

Back issues are available to members at 75p/$1.50 each, although issues 1-20 inclusive can be purchased for £10/$20 complete. Non-members may request a sample copy for 75p/$1.50 post paid. Requests for back issues should be sent to the Editor, to whom cheques should be made payable.

The group leader is Richard Saundry, Gwrych Cottage, Godstone Road, Bletchingley, REDHILL, Surrey RH1 4PL, England. Phone 0883 742186.

The Group does not run a packet. The SMPS Packet Secretary is Brian Sylvester, 3 Russel Court, St Lukes Road, MAIDENHEAD, Berks SL6 7AP, England. Phone 0628 784555.

Although most packets are of a general nature, there are occasional specialised one country packets. Good and unusual material is always wanted.

Owing to insurance difficulties, the packet is not available to overseas members, although we shall be pleased to accept material for inclusion in the packet from them.

The Auctioneer of the SMPS is Brian Moorhouse, to whom Auction and Private Treaty lots should be sent. Brian is a dealer, and will include your name on his mailing list if requested.

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EDITORIAL

Once again we reach the end of another year and it is with every good wish that we send Christmas Greetings to you and to your family. May the New Year bring peace and prosperity and many additions to your collection.

The new year also brings a request to you to renew your subscription. If your envelope has a red cross on it then the mailing list I received recently shows your subscription for 1994 due. If you have renewed your subscription in the last couple of weeks , thank you, if you have not done so, please do, and if we have made an error, please inform us.

If you do not renew your subscription no more Newsletters will be sent.

To those of you who subscribed to 'The Seebecker' I am sorry that there has not been more of specific Seebeck interest for you, but I have only heard from Bill Welch, and I cannot publish what I do not get. Perhaps I will hear from you in the New Year?

The next meeting of the Spanish Main will be held on Saturday 26 February, as usual at the Victory Services Club. The theme of the meeting will be aerophilately and some eminent speakers have been invited. A programme is enclosed for those of you who live in Britain.

I have had a request from John Fosbery for booklets of Nicaraguan material. He is hoping to put out a Nicaragua packet in the near future. If you would like to receive it, let him know, but more importanty if you can put a/some booklet(s) in it, do please. Christmas is a good time to sit and make up booklets I find, a time when you have to come out of your study, but can never get the programme you want on the TV!
(Mr J A L Fosbery, 52 St Leonards Road, Newton Abbot, Devon TQ12 1JX, 0626 52718)

mpb

HANDSTAMPED RATE MARKINGS IN PRESTAMP CENTRAL AMERICA

by LEO J HARRIS

Postal rates in the countries now comprising Central America, being Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Salvador, were expressed in Reales during the entire prestamp period. It was also possible to send a letter either prepaid or postage due between these countries, as well as Mexico, in that period of time. Accordingly it makes some sense to describe these rate markings in a single group.

During the Spanish Colonial period there was, at most, a single Central American city which applied handstamp rate markings. This city, now Rivas, now in the Republic of Nicaragua, but which had the name of Nicaragua, apparently used brown woodblock markings in the 2, 4, 8, 10, 16, 18 and 30 reales denominations (Fig.1).

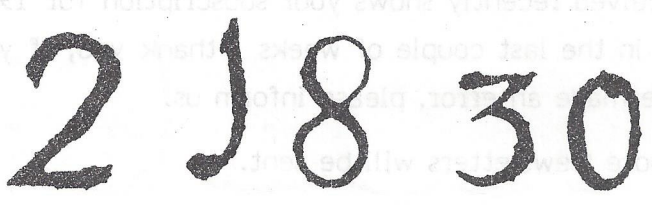


Figure 1.

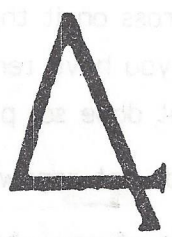


Figure 2.

The difficulty, if there is one, is that these markings were found only in a single collection originally assembled by a Guatemalan philatelist. An examination of photocopies of over 100 other wrappers and fronts which originated in the city of Nicaragua, found in the largest archival collection of Central American prestamp wrappers and fronts, that formed by Arturo Taracena, does not disclose a single other copy of these markings. While that fact alone is not disqualifying, at least for the moment we should probably withhold judgement on these items.

It is tempting, based only upon examination of a single wrapper or two, to assign other handstamped rate markings to various Central American cities during the Colonial period. However, a number of Mexican, Caribbean and Spanish cities utilised handstamped rate markings during this era, and inevitably the markings noted on incoming mail items to Central American destinations come from these places.

The other handstamped mark from Nicaragua, used during the Central American Federation period is from Leon (Fig.2). This "4" mark, circa 1929, is found only in blue, and is known only on fronts used to Nicaragua (Rivas) and to San Jose.

There are two varieties of handstamped rate marks used in Guatemala City. The first, larger group (Fig.3) are found in shades of red. They were used in the Federation and then in the Republican period, between 1826 and 1850.

Figure 3.

The second, smaller group (Fig.4) are found in shades of red, blue, green and black. They were used in the Republican period, between 1850 and 1871.

Figure 4.

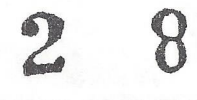


Figure 5.

Various collectors have tried to relate the colour of the mark to whether the underlying wrapper or front was sent prepaid or postage due. The truth is that, probably, the colour of the mark is most often the colour of the accompanying postmark or datestamp.

The remaining variety of handstamped mark (Fig.5) from Guatemala was used in Yzabal. These small "2" and "8" marks are known in orange, from 1860.

Three handstamped two reales rate markings are known from Honduras (Fig.6). All three are found in black, on wrappers which also have rectangular "Franqueado en/Tegusigalpa" postmark, indicating prepayment at the time of mailing. The 1860 and 1862 items were originally in the Irving Green collection of Honduras. They are illustrated in The Collectors Club Philatelist (Vol.44, No.5, p287).

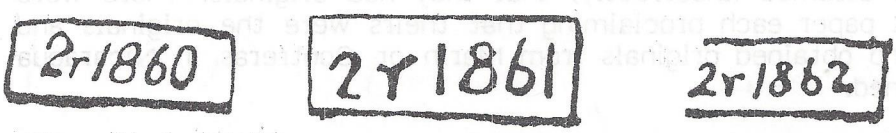


Figure 6.

Figure 7.

The last mark, from San Salvador, has not been reported previously (Fig.7). Three copies have now been noted of this red orange "2" marking which, while similar to the larger "2" mark of Guatemala City, yet on analysis is clearly different. Two copies are noted on folded letters from Guatemala City to San Salvador, where the "2" was clearly a due mark, while the third, on a folded letter to Guatemala City, was a statement of the rate at the time of posting. This mark was used in the late 1830's.

The author would welcome information on these and other handstamped rate markings which may be found in the future.

A note about the illustrations.

As with any postmark which was used for a period of time, variation in its application and wear and tear on the device itself will result in slightly different versions of the same mark. These illustrations are, in the main, made from clear, early versions of each mark. Marks in other denominations are noted for markings illustrated in Figures 1, 3 and 4. Obviously marks of other denominations may in the future be discovered for the other categories as well.

THE RAILWAYS OF NICARAGUA from Giana Wayman of Costa Rica

A few comments on the Rivas and Leon railroad sets of Nicaragua.

The stamps were prepared hastily and with little advance notice to the philatelic world. They were printed in sheetlets of four with margins on all sides. At least one set of the sheets of both issues of the air values existed as of about 15 years ago as we had sold one. However I have never seen another. All the stamps were sold out on the days of issue to local collectors and dealers. Several new issue dealers however had heard of the issue and sent in orders for as many as possible. Their orders got to Managua in late January and February and included Champion in Paris, Stanley Gibbons and Harmer Rooke in New York. The Minister of Communication (or someone under him) did not like the idea of all that money not being accepted. When the orders came in he had 250(?) sheets of reprints m ade and sent the out to the dealers with the note "I have managed to acquire the entire issue for you". This happened five times. It is even possible that the money went into Government funds, but knowing Nicaragua I would not bet on it. In any case it is not accurate to refer to them as 'fraudulent' reprints but rather (semi-)official reprints.

The colours are as good (or as bad) as the originals but the printer did not think it necessary to consider the paper. Consideration of the so-called 'slitting' is really not necessary. The originals are on very white, even shiny, paper. The reprints are on five different papers. They vary from soft yellowish through hard beige off white, soft off white, soft thin off white to a very thin very hard paper. Looking at the back of the stamps it is very easy to separate the originals from everything else. They are a real white and anything else just ain't. The confusion arose because collectors who obtained their stamps from reliable sources assumed (incorrectly) that they had originals. There were collectors with five different paper each proclaiming that theirs were the originals and decrying all others. Those who obtained originals from Marin or Contreras in Nicaragua were doubted. Confusion reigned.

continued on page 280

THE RAILWAYS OF MEXICO by DR ANTHONY GOODBODY

Introduction

Mexico is sometimes regarded as forming part of North America, but culturally it is probably more akin to the countries of South and Central America. It extends from the United States border to Guatemala, a distance approaching 2,000 miles, with a breadth varying between 1,000 miles and 130 miles. The total area is nearly 764,000 square miles.

The history of Mexico makes fascinating reading. When, under Iturbide, she gained her independence from Spain in 1821, her borders extended northwards to include Texas, California, Nevada, Utah and parts of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Wyoming. For a short time too, even the Central American States were part of the Mexican Empire, but with the downfall of Iturbide in 1823 they seceded, with the exception of Chiapas which is still part of Mexico. Texas followed suit in 1836 and was later annexed by the United States. As a result, war was declared between Mexico and the United States and lasted from 1846 to 1848. Mexico lost both the conflict and the American States mentioned above. The history of the Federal Republic, their short lived Empire under Maximillian and the Civil War of 1913-15 may be traced by reading the pages of a stamp catalogue (or a history book if you prefer). However we are more concerned with the railways.

The Railways

The first railway to be built in Mexico was the spectacular main line from Veracruz to Mexico City, a distance of 264 miles. The concession for building the first twenty miles of track, as far as the San Juan River, was granted in 1842. The first three miles had been built by 1849 and the section was completed in 1854. Most of the railway was built during the 1860's and the line was opened to traffic on 1 January 1873.

Today the Ferrocarriles Nacionales de Mexico operate some 20,000 km of track, most of it standard guage. It was nationalised in 1977 and comprised the following five major systems:

National Railways of Mexico	14,151 km.
Pacific Railway	2,315 km.
Chihuahua-Pacific Railway	1,515 km.
South Western United Railways	1,360 km.
Sonora-Baja California Railway	607 km.

Definitive Issue, 1895 (SG 228-30, 240-2, 251-2, 263-5)

The definitive issue of 1895 depicts various methods of mail transport from foot postman onwards. At that time the railways were undoubtedly the newest, fastest and most efficient method of mail transport; consequently the stamps showing the mail train appeared at the end of the set.

They are the 1, 5 and 10 peso values and all appear with a variety of watermarks. The locomotive, when examined closely, is crudely drawn and I do not think it would be possible to identify it.

Definitive Issue, 1915 (SG 299, 410, 433)

Some writers have claimed that the thickish lines on this map represent railways. However the resemblance of these lines to a map of Mexican Railways is not particularly striking.

Parcel Post, 1941 (SG P673-4, P732-3, P835-6)

The train is being hauled by a typical 4-8-4 built by ALCO in the 1930's and 1940's. Typical dimensions are given below:

Weight in working order	175 t
Diameter of coupled wheels	70 inches
Cylinders (diam. x stroke)	25 x 30 inches
Boiler pressure	250 lbs/sq in
Tractive effort	57,000 lbs

Opening of the Southeastern Railway, 1950 (SG 864-7)

The completion of this railway, 737 km in length, provided the first land link across the Tehuantepec Isthmus. It extends from Coatzacoalcos (Puerto Mexico) to Campeche, thus connecting the United Railways of Yucatan with the National Railways System. On 1 September 1968 the Southeastern Railway merged with the United Railways of Yucatan to form the Southeastern United Railways.

The 15¢ value shows a workman laying track while the 20¢ value shows a stylised diesel locomotive carrying the emblem of the National Railways. Steam and diesel trains crossing the Tehuantepec Isthmus appear on the 25¢ value, while the top value of 35¢ shows Miguel Aleman, President of Mexico 1946-52, and an unidentified railway bridge.

Parcel Post, 1951 (SG P871-2, P916-7)

The diesel-electric locomotive is Nº.6213, class DE-10 of the Mexican National Railways. It was the last of fourteen type F2 'A' or cab units built in 1946 by General Motors, Electromotive Division and numbered 6200/13. There were also fourteen 'B' units without cabs to work with the 'A' units, and having the same running numbers. They were the last of this type to go to Mexico and Nº.6213 was the last F2 unit to be built by General Motors. It was scrapped in 1955, much earlier than the rest of the class.

Weight in working order	460,000 lbs
Length over buffers	96ft 6in
Maximum speed	70 mph
Axles	2(Bo-Bo)
Diameter of wheels	40 inches
Power rating	2 x 1350 hp
Nº. and type of engines	2 x GM model 16-567A
Maximum starting tractive effort	2 x 57,500 lbs

50th Anniversary of the Death of Jesus Garcia, 1957 (SG 963)

Most people know the story of Casey Jones and the Cannonball Express, but Mexico too has its railroad folk hero who dies in circumstances hardly less dramatic. Jesus Garcia Corona was born in 1883 at Hermosillo. From an early age he went to work for the Montezuma Copper Company on the Nacozari Mining Railway, driving one of the line's two switchers (shunting locomotives) between the mines and Nacozari.

On the morning of 7 November 1907, when bringing his train of two cars loaded with dynamite into the yard at Nacozari, it was seen that smoke was coming from one of the cars. Knowing the danger to the town if the fire were to reach the dynamite while the train was in the yard, he reversed the train into a cutting where it exploded. Garcia and twelve others were killed but the town was unharmed. The fiftieth anniversary of Garcia's death was commemorated by this stamp, showing the front of a locomotive and the dying Garcia in the arms of his sorrowing wife. The design is somewhat fanciful because no part of Garcia was ever recovered.

Jesus Garcia is one of the people honoured in the Railroad Hall of Fame, Cottage Grove, Oregon. The Hall of Fame was founded by C J Keenan who also helped to found the Casey Jones Railroad Unit of the American Topical Association, and was responsible for persuading the Mexican postal authorities to issue the stamp.

Opening of the Chihuahua-Pacific Railway, 1961 (SG 995-7)

The Chihuahua al Pacifico was first proposed in 1872 under the ambitious title 'Kansas City, Mexico and Orient'. As its name suggests, the line's promoters expected the railway to bring trade from the Far East to the heart of the United States. Construction was begun in 1900 and proceeded from the Pacific port of Topolobampa as far as San Pedro in the Sierrs Madre Mountains. The line was also built between Sanchez on the northern slopes of the mountain, and Minaca the junction with the Mexican North Western Railway, which afforded a connection with Ciudad Juarez on the United States border opposite El Paso. The gap between the two mountain towns was still not closed when the railway was purchased by the Mexican Government in 1940, and it was not until 1953 that it was decided to finish the line. Work was begun in 1954 and completed in 1961. The last and most expensive section of the Chihuahua al Pacifico had to overcome very considerable engineering problems. It has 71 tunnels and an aggregate length of 13,343 metres, and 25 bridges of which the longest are the 498 metre El Puerto and the 235 metre Chinipas spans.

11th Pan-American Railways Congress, Mexico City, 1963 (SG 1041-2)

The 20¢ value shows two units of a diesel-electric locomotive with the Mexican National Railways emblem on the front but with livery which does not correspond with that used by the railway. It appears to be a General Motors type E8 built around 1949.

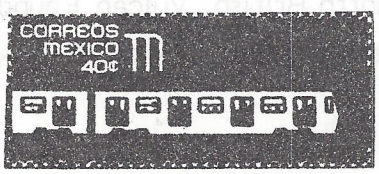
Weight in working order	624,800 lbs
Length over buffers	140ft 3in
Maximum speed	117 mph
Axles	2(A1A-A1A)
Diameter of wheels	36 inches
Power rating	2 x 2250 hp
Nº. and type of engines	4 x GM model 12-567B
Max starting tractive effort	2 x 52,280 lbs

The diesel-electric locomotive on the $1.20 value is another General Motors type, probably the freight locomotive model F7 or possibly the corresponding passenger type FP7 which differs from the F7 only by being four feet longer in order to accommodate an additional 950 gallons of train-heating water. The mysterious letters SCOP stand for Secretary of Comminications and Public Works (in Spanish), a Government agency which was at one time in charge of Government owned railways other than the Mexican National Railways. These included the Chihuahua al Pacifico, the Unidos del Sureste and the Sonora-Baja California.

Weight in working order	460,000 lbs
Length over buffers	100ft 8in
Maximum speed	65 mph
Axles	2(Bo-Bo)
Diameter of wheels	40 inches
Power rating	2 x 1500 hp
N°. and type of engines	2 x GM model D-17B
Max starting tractive effort	2 x 57,500 lbs

The steam locomotive is perhaps a 4-4-0 rebuild of an early Norris bogie 4-2-0. The name 'Philadelphia', home of the Norris factory, appears on the side of the tender. I can find no illustration which corresponds with it exactly; neither can I offer any opinion on the horse-drawn tram.

Inauguration of the Mexico City Metro, 1969 (SG 1189)



A translation of part of the information printed on the back of the official First Day Cover reads as follows: "By Constitutional Decree of Senor Licenciado Don Gustavo Diaz Ordaz, President of the Republic, work was started on 19 June 1967 and has fortunately progressed ahead of planned schedule. Three basic lines were initially planned with a total length of 32 km wholly underground; on them were to be 48 stations three of them interchanges, destined to serve densely populated areas of the city which are in need of transport."

The rolling stock as depicted on the stamp was built in France by Brissonneau et Lotz and CIMT-Lorraine (Compagnie Industrielle de Materiel de Transport). Originally the trains were formed from two or three car sets each with a driving car at each end and a trailer in the middle. With increasing traffic it was envisaged that a third set consisting of a trailer and two non-driving motor cars with all axles motored would be added in the middle of the train. All four axles of the driving cars are driven by 150 hp motors. As in Paris and Montreal standard flanged rail wheels are provided as well as rubber tyred wheels and their concrete tracks and guide rails. The rail wheels come into play to guide the train over points or if the pneumatic tyres should be deflated.

Railway Centenary, 1973 (SG 1273)

This stamp marks the Centenary of the opening of the earliest and most spectacular of Mexico's main lines - from Vera Cruz to Mexico City, a distance of 264 miles. The concession for building the first twenty miles of line, as far as the San Juan River was granted in 1842. The first three miles had been built by 1849 and the section was completed in 1854. Most of the railway was built during the 1860's and the line was opened for traffic on 1 January 1873.

The stamp shows the Metlac viaduct after a painting by J M Velasco. At Fortin, 71 miles from Veracruz and 3309 feet above sea level, the line crosses the ravine via the bridge shown on the stamp. It is 92 feet above the river and 350 feet long with a curve of 325 feet radius on a 3% gradient. It is supported by eight cast-iron and masonry-enclosed pillars. The bridge is considered to be the most difficult on the line and flagmen guide trains across it.

Normally it would not be possible to comment on a locomotive which is shown on such a tiny scale as the one on the stamp. In this case however the twin plumes of smok inicate that it is a double-boilered Fairlie. Fifty of these locomotives were sent to Mexico during the period 1871-1911. They were built by Avonside, Nielson, North British, Vulcan Foundry and the Yorkshire Engine Company. They were of varying dimensions but all were 0-6-6-0.

Pan-American Railways Congress, 1981 (SG 1614)

This locomotive of the Mexican National Railways is stated to have been purchased from General Electric in 1973. A photograph of an exactly similar locomotive carrying the running number 8901 appears in the 1978 edition of 'World Railways'. It appears to be General Electric model U33C.

Weight in working order	363,600 lbs
Length over couplings	67ft 3in
Maximum speed	70 mph
Axles	Co-Co
Diameter of wheels	40 inches
Power rating	3000 hp
Nº. and type of engines	1 x FDL 16
Continuous tractive effort	90,600 lbs

50th Anniversary of the Nationalisation of the Mexican Railways, 1987

In 1908 a company known as the National Railways of Mexico (N de M) was formed from the amalgamation of the Mexican National Railroad (2388 km), the Mexican Central

Railway (5739 km), the International Railroad (1809 km), the Vera Cruz and Isthmus Railway (545 km), the Pan American Railroad (457 km), the Hidalgo Railroad (211 km) and a collection of miscellaneous private lines (234 km). As stated above the N de M was amalgamated with four other major systems in 1977 to form the FNM. I can offer no explanation for the dates on the stamp.

We come now to the stamp design. By implication the Metlac Viaduct, also referred to above (SG 1273) has been replaced by a concrete structure and the railway re-aligned to make the viaduct straight and less dangerous but at the same time less exciting. I have no independent confirmation of this development.

80th Anniversary of the Mexicanisation of Railways, 1989

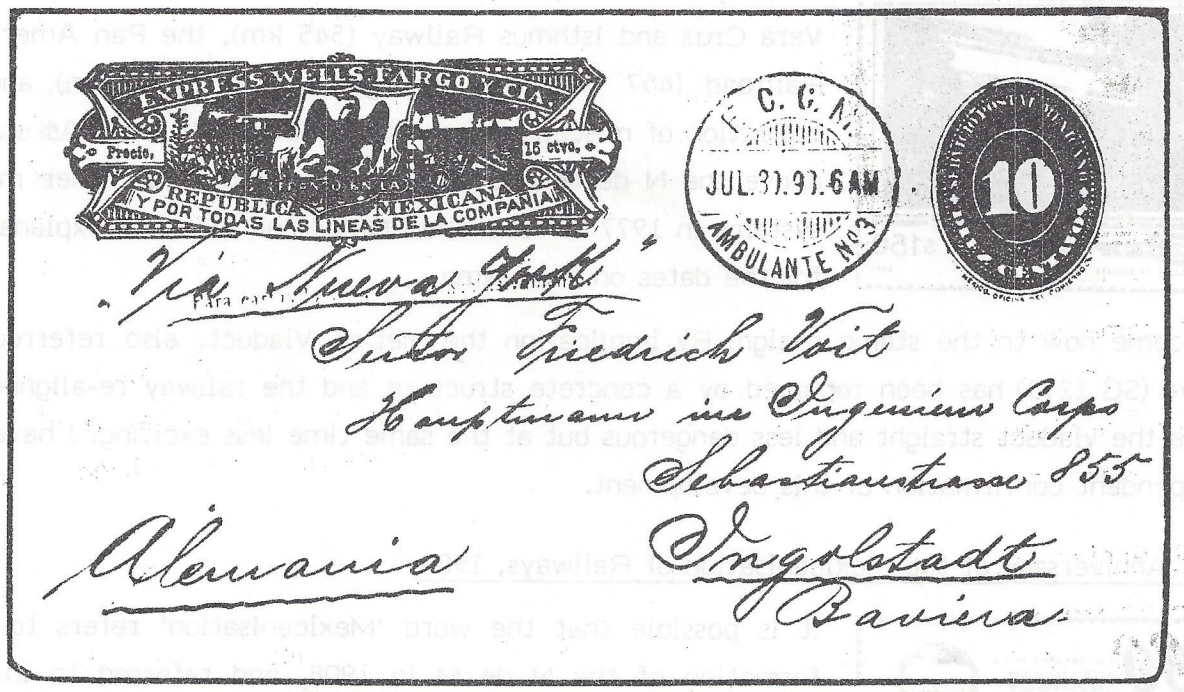
It is possible that the word 'Mexicanisation' refers to the formation of the N de M in 1908, and referred to in the previous entry. In the book 'Railway Wonders of the World' (a serial publication published by the Amalgamated Press in the 1930's) great emphasis is placed on the fact that of the 34,000 or so employees of the N de M, all but a tiny handful were Mexicans, and these were mostly the Company's agents abroad. I would suggest that having a virtually 100% Mexican work force is what is meant by 'Mexicanisation'.

I have not been able to identify the 'Mogal' locomotive (2-6-0) dating from the 1870's or 1880's but the diesel-electric locomotive is the one which appears on the Pan-American Railways Congress stamp of 1981 (qv). Again I have no information about Felipe Pescador although I have discovered that he has given his name to a town in Mexico.

Wells Fargo Frank

These franks, which feature a primitive train in the design, were issued between 1885 and 1895, and were in use until 1906. There exist over 200 different varieties from Mexico and several dozen from the USA. All franks are in shades of green and come in 10, 15 and 25 centavo values. In addition these envelopes are also re-valued by handstamp or manuscript to 30, 45, 60, 80 centavos etc..

They exist on various Mexican and US stamped envelopes which had been used to pay postage - the Wells Fargo frank was used to pay the fee to the Company. The envelopes come in three sizes and carry in addition to the handstamped surcharge (usually in purple) for various weights an endorsement for various weights and destinations: for example "To carry 1 oz to the United States Exclusively".



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The next and final article in this series will cover the Republic of Panama and include the Canal Zone. Unfortunately Tony lacks some of the stamps and so I publish here a wants list in the hope that some of our members may assist him.

Wants list (all unused)

Canal Zone, 1928 definitives. SG111-5, 10c, 14c, 15c, 30. 1946 definitives. SG 193, 25c. 1951 West Indian Labourers. SG 211, 10c.

Republic of Panama, 1955 De Lesseps. SG 571, 25c. 1939 definitives. SG 358, 1c 1979 Canal takeover. SG 1144, 3c.

Any offers to Dr A M Goodbody, 79 Forest Road, Birkenhead, Merseyside L43 1UH.

∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞∞

Continued from page 272

Covers however show the difference. Unfortunately there are not many of them, probably less than ten and maybe as few as five with Rivas stamps. There are none with a complete set of either the ordinary or the air stamps or with a prepared 'FDC' appearance. Most with one to three stamps are probably from collectors but used for paying postage. There are a few more with the Leon set with possibly ten with the complete air set on a FDC type cover. The latter is worth perhaps $300 and the rest whatever the buyer/seller agree as each is unique. I recently sold a Rivas cover for $450 but that was probably too cheap. The buyers comment was "Thanks, I will take any more you find".

Be careful with covers. All ones used on the correct dates, 17 and 30 December 1932 that I have seen are genuine. There are a number with original stamps, genuine cancels and correct transit and arrival backstamps of overseas destinations from the May-July 1933 period. They look completely good and did legitimately go through the mails. They are mostly of the Leon air issue. However they were done with the best tricks I have seen. The Leon stamps did not pay the postage as they were valid only on 30 December 1932. They were treated as labels and cancelled by favour. If you look at the strikes on the back they are all on one side. On the other side a piece of paper was glued with valid stamps affixed. The paper was later removed and you have a beautiful cover with every mark on it completely genuine.

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"VIA NICARAGUA" - AN UNUSUAL RATE

by MICHAEL P BIRKS

"Lived a miner, forty-niner,
And his daughter, Clementine."

These lines from one of the most popular 'sing-along' songs of our time refer, as everyone knows, to the gold rush era of California. But California had been a relatively remote region before that time, having been conquered by the Spanish in 1846 and finally being ceded to the United States two years later. It was a difficult place to get to. The land crossing took five months and the route was marked with the graves of those who did not make it. Men who fought to overcome mountains, raging rivers, boiling desert and ice and snow. One alternative was a long and tedious 150-200 day voyage around Cape Horn, in poor ships, cramped conditions and often little water.

On 24 January 1848, James Wilson Marshall discovered gold at Sutter's Mill and the secret was fairly well kept until May when Sam Brannan ran down the streets of San Francisco shouting "Gold! Gold! Gold". Things were about to change.

To meet the demand for passage from New York to San Francisco a route was opened up through Panama. Steamships conveyed passengers to the isthmus where they had to make their own way across tothe Pacific coast by foot, mule and boat to await another steamer to carry them onwards. Torrential rain, exposure and tropical diseases were the norm until the railway was completed in 1855. But even then, death was commonplace and misery a travel companion.

The ships plying the 'Panama route' entered into a contract with the US postal service for the carrying of mail on a monthly basis. Initially the service was very irregular and there were many complaints about the arrival of ships without any mail whatsoever. The rate was fixed at 12½¢ in 1848, which was a significant reduction on the 40¢ being charged prior to that date. However despite this reduction there were further calls for an even lower rate, and in 1851 a new, lower rate was introduced.

> "From and after June 30, 1851, in lieu of the rates of postage now established by law, there shall be charged the following rates:
>
> For every single letter in writing, marks, or signs, conveyed not exceeding 3,000 miles, if prepaid 3 cents; if not prepaid, 5 cents, and for any greater distance double said rates; ....."

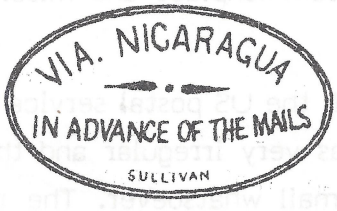
Thus after 30 June 1851, letters to California were charged 6¢ if prepaid. This rate, and its attendant 10¢ unpaid rate applied to mail carried on a post road, but with one important exception. A post road was any route along which a contract for the carrying of mails existed, even if some or most of that journey was by steamer. However unpaid mail carried on a post road, but which arrived by sea i.e. at New York, was treated as a ship's letter, and charged accordingly. So we have an anomaly here; mail prepaid was charged in

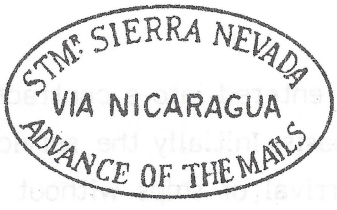
one way, whilst unpaid mail was charged according to a different tarrif if it arrived by sea, as all mail from California did. It would appear that the US Post Office was willing to accept mail carried by private carrier from California at the same rate only if fully prepaid.

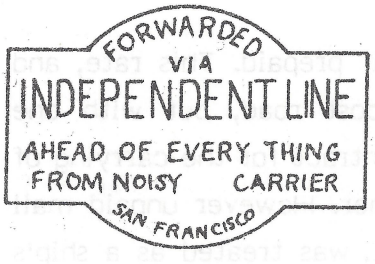
In trying to find a better route to California Cornelius Vanderbilt opened a route through Nicaragua, some 700 miles shorter than via Panama. However the main thrust of his advertising was to point out the fewer deaths on his ships than on those plying via Panama. Soon his line became very popular, and he became an even richer man.

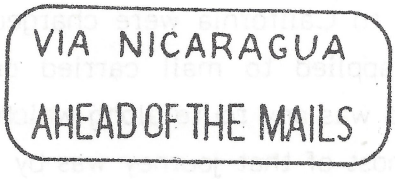
The earliest report of mail carried by a Vanderbilt steamer was published on 14 February 1852, but this was not mail deposited in the San Francisco post office, which had by postal edict to be carried by the regular mail steamers. There existed in San Francisco a number of entrepreneurs who for a small fee would collect mail, affix the necessary adhesives, and forward via any steamer willing to carry the bag for a fee. The mail was then put into the US mail in New York. Men such as J W Sullivan, G W Leland and the 'Noisy Carrier' Charles Kimball have become legenday for the cachets they applied to such mail. There are many such cachets, applied in a variety of colours and bearing the legend "Via Nicaragua, Ahead of the Mails" or "Via Nicaragua, In Advance of the Mails".

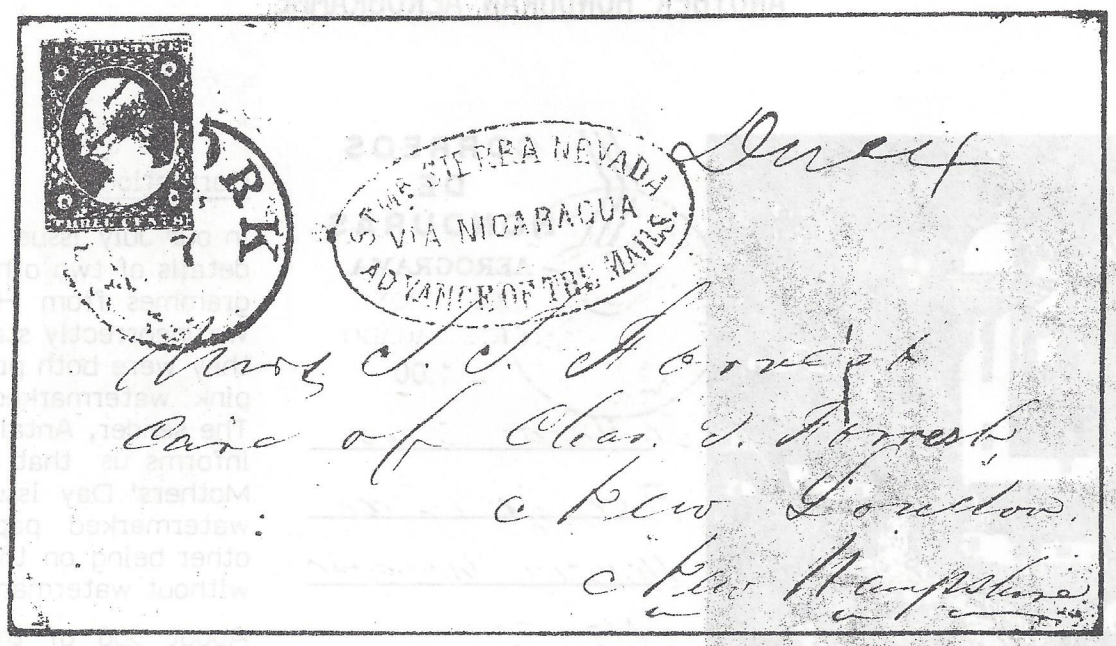
Some of these cachets are illustrated here.











The cover illustrated here is one of the more unusual of its type. It sailed on the steamer Sierra Nevada which left San Francisco on 15 June 1854, was carried across Nicaragua, probably on a mule, and transferred to the steamer The Star of the West, which arrived in New York on 7 August 1854. As stated earlier the rate for this letter was 6¢ prepaid, and it may well be that 6¢ was affixed, although there is no trace of a second stamp. However by the time it got to New York only one 3¢ stamp was evident, and so the cover was underpaid. According to postal regulations it was treated as a ship's letter and charged 5¢ to which was added a further 2¢ since it was addressed to a point outside the port of entry. This total of 7¢ less the 3¢ prepaid gives rise to the 'Due 4' manuscript marking top right, which at first sight does not seem to fit. The rating clerk in New York should also have added the word 'SHIP', but he did not.

On 1 April 1855 the prepayment option was removed and prepayment became compulsory. So for three years and ten months there was a possibility of a 7¢ rate between the two coasts of the United States. I have never seen any other 7¢ covers, and indeed I am hoping that mine is uniqe. If it is not, I feel sure someone will let me know!

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Probably 80% of the covers with originals are like this. I have also seen a few covers with reprints from the late 1930's and even early 1950's.

Some of the reprints must have remained in Nicaragua or were returned to it as sets exist with favour cancels. I have available the Rivas and Leon air sets with such cancels at $25 each. I also have a lovely set of the Rivas air reprints in the sheetlets of four at $225.

(Giana Wayman, Apartado 6737, San Jose, Costa Rica).

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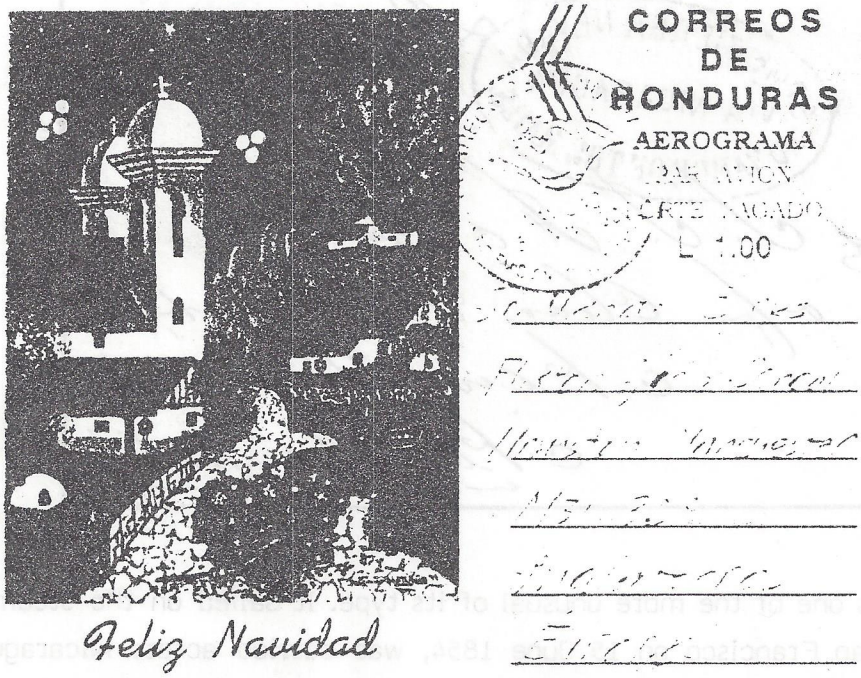
ANOTHER HONDURAN AEROGRAMME



Correction

In our July issue we gave details of two other aerogrammes from Honduras. We incorrectly stated that they were both printed on pink watermarked paper. The sender, Antal Borcsok informs us that only the Mothers' Day issue is on watermarked paper, the other being on thin paper without watermark.

About 500 of the 5,000 Mothers' Day aerogrammes are known with inverted watermark.

From 'our man' in Honduras, Antal Borcsok, comes another aerogramme, which we illustrate above. Celebrating Christmas this aerogramme is once again produced in a limited quantity of only 5,000 copies. The date of issue was 5 November 1993. It can be found with an inverted watermark.

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All values of the originals have shade differences and the Rivas ordinary 1c and 15c have two distinct colours. All this in only 250 sheets of 4 of each stamp. The plates must have been hand inked after each few sheets. If they had had a tray from which ink was applied to the plate and even if additional ink had been added to that tray several times the shade differences and the different but similar colours on the 1c and 15c could be explained. The reprints mostly ave shades well within the range of the originals so that is no help in telling the difference. The two colours of the 1c and 15c must have been noticed when the stamps were issued, as reprints come in both colours though probably not on all papers.

Whilst these issues have often been looked down on as abuses of collectors, that is really not fair. They were issued for very important and celibrated local events and were openly available at the post office to the public. The printing quantity was small, but for a one day commemorative issue for Nicaragua was a reasonable amount. The face values were low. The abuse came later with that irresistable money being offered by new issue dealers from abroad.

While the reprints on these issues were at least semi-official that was not true with the 1932 earthquake or 1933 race issue where the reprints were truly fraudulent. More on those another day.

[I look forward to that-Ed]